Indian Fishermen in Pakistani Jails

*116. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU:

SHRI V.P. DURAISAMY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is **a** fact that some Tamil Nadu fishermen have been lodged in Pakistani jails since June, 1999;

(b) whether it is also a fact that they have been handed over to Pakistani' authorities by the Iranian Government;

(c) what diplomatic efforts have been made, so far, by Government to get them released; and

(d) whether Government would consider to get them released in exchange of Pakistani fishermen who were caught, recently in the Gujarat coast?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (d) On receipt of information that 19 fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu were in Pakistan custody, Government raised the matter in July 1999 with the Government of Pakistan and demanded that they be released immediately so that they could be repatriated to India. It was also learnt that these fishermen had gone to Saudi Arabia but, while fishing, had strayed into Iranian territorial waters, following which Iranian authorities pushed them into Pakistan. This matter was taken up with the Iranian authorities through diplomatic channels on several occasions. They have assured that such incidents would not be repeated in future.

After repeated reminders by Government, the Government of Pakistan acknowledged the presence in its custody of the 19 fishermen in September 1999. Consular access to these fishermen was provided only on 3 January, 2000. Since then, Pakistani authorities have not indicated their willingness to release the detained fishermen. Discussions for the release of fishermen of both countries in each others custody continue through diplomatic channels.